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MILITARY READINESS

Observations on Personnel
Readiness in Later
Deploying Army Divisions

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Mr. Chairmen and Members of the Subcommittees:

We are pleased to be here to discuss our preliminary findings from our ongoing evaluation of personnel readiness in the Army's five later-deploying divisions. These divisions constitute almost half of the Army's active combat forces and, according to Army officials, are critical to the success of specific war plans and the national military strategy.

This morning, I would first like to summarize our preliminary observations regarding personnel readiness in the later-deploying divisions. Then, I would like to describe in more detail the (1) extent of personnel shortages in the divisions and the extent to which these shortages are reflected in readiness reports, (2) key factors contributing to personnel shortages and the impact such shortages have on readiness, (3) Army's plans for correcting such shortages should these divisions be called upon to deploy, and (4) issues to be considered in dealing with personnel shortages. Unless otherwise indicated, the information provided reflects what we found at the time of our visits to the later-deploying divisions during the period August 1997 through January 1998.

Summary

In the aggregate, the Army's five later-deploying divisions had an average of 93 percent of their personnel on board at the time of our visits. However, aggregate data does not fully reflect the extent of shortages of combat troops, technical specialists, experienced officers, and noncommissioned officers (NCO) that exist in those divisions.

The readiness reporting system that contains the aggregate data on these divisions does not fully disclose the impact of personnel shortages on the ability of the divisions' units to accomplish critical wartime tasks. As a result, there is a disconnect between the reported readiness of these forces in formal readiness reports and the actual readiness that we observed on our visits. These disconnects exist because the unit readiness reporting system does not consider some information that has a significant impact on a unit's readiness, such as operating tempo, personnel shortfalls in key positions, and crew and squad staffing.

The Army's priority in assigning personnel to these divisions, Army-wide shortages of personnel, frequent deployments to peacekeeping missions, and the assignment of soldiers to other tasks outside of their specialty are the primary reasons for personnel shortfalls.

The impact of personnel shortages on training and readiness is exacerbated by the extent to which personnel are being used for work outside their specialties or units. According to commanders in all the divisions, the collective impact of understaffing squads and crews, transferring to other jobs the NCOs from the crews and squads they are responsible for training, and assigning personnel to other units as fillers for exercises and operations have degraded their capability and readiness.

If the Army had to deploy these divisions for a high-intensity conflict, these divisions would fill their units with Individual Ready Reserve Soldiers,¹ retired servicemembers, and newly recruited soldiers. However, the Army's plan for providing these personnel includes assumptions that have not been validated, and there may not be enough trained personnel to fully staff or fill later-deploying divisions within their scheduled deployment times.

Solutions, if any, to these problems will depend upon how the Army plans to use these divisions in the future.

Before I continue, I want to provide you with some additional background about the Army's divisions.

Background

Today's Army faces an enormous challenge to balance risks and resources in order to meet its many missions. Since 1990, active Army ranks have been reduced from 770,000 to 495,000 personnel, a reduction of about 36 percent. Simultaneously, world events have dictated that forces be trained and ready to respond to potential high-intensity missions in areas such as Korea and the Persian Gulf while conducting peace enhancement operations around the world.

The Army currently has 10 active combat divisions compared to the 18 it had at the start of Operation Desert Storm in 1991.² Four of the 10 divisions are considered contingency divisions and would be the first to deploy in the event of a major theater war. These units are the 82nd Airborne, 101st Air Assault, 3rd Infantry, and 1st Cavalry divisions. The

¹The Individual Ready Reserve is comprised of officers and enlisted soldiers with prior military service who are completing their 8-year military service obligation or who are not assigned to units. The majority of these personnel have no annual training requirements.

²Three of the 18 divisions were composed of 2 active brigades and 1 reserve component brigade. Today, the 10 divisions are composed of all active duty units.

2nd Infantry Division, while not a contingency force division, is already deployed in Korea.

The remaining five divisions, which are the focus of my testimony, are expected to deploy in the event of a second simultaneous or nearly simultaneous major theater contingency or as reinforcements for a larger-than-expected first contingency. These units are the 1st Armored, 1st Infantry, 4th Infantry, 10th Infantry, and 25th Infantry divisions. Also, these divisions have been assigned the bulk of the recent peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Haiti, and the 4th Infantry division over the last 2 years has been conducting the Army's advanced war-fighting experiment.

Appendix I provides a list of the Army's current active divisions and the locations of each division's associated brigades.

Personnel Shortages Are Significant in Later-Deploying Divisions

In the aggregate, the Army's later-deploying divisions were assigned 66,053, or 93 percent, of their 70,665 authorized personnel at the beginning of fiscal year 1998. However, aggregate numbers do not adequately reflect the condition that exists within individual battalions, companies, and platoons of these divisions. This is because excess personnel exist in some grades, ranks, and skills, while shortages exist in others. For example, while the 1st Armored Division was staffed at 94 percent in the aggregate, its combat support and service support specialties were filled at below 85 percent, and captains and majors were filled at 73 percent.

In addition, a portion of each later-deploying division exists only on paper because all authorized personnel have not been assigned. All these divisions contain some squads, crews, and platoons in which no personnel or a minimum number of personnel are assigned. Assigning a minimum number of personnel to a crew means having fewer personnel than needed to fully accomplish wartime missions; for example, having five soldiers per infantry squad rather than nine, tank crews with three soldiers instead of four, or artillery crews with six soldiers rather than nine. We found significant personnel shortfalls in all the later-deploying divisions. For example:

- At the 10th Infantry Division, only 138 of 162 infantry squads were fully or minimally filled, and 36 of the filled squads were unqualified.
- At the 2nd and 3rd brigades of the 25th Infantry Division, 52 of 162 infantry squads were minimally filled or had no personnel assigned.

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- At the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division, only 56 percent of the authorized infantry soldiers for its Bradley Fighting Vehicles were assigned, and in the 2nd Brigade, 21 of 48 infantry squads had no personnel assigned.
 - At the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Armored Division, only 16 of 116 M1A1 tanks had full crews and were qualified, and in one of the Brigade's two armor battalions, 14 of 58 tanks had no crewmembers assigned because the personnel were deployed to Bosnia. In addition, at the Division's engineer brigade in Germany, 11 of 24 bridge teams had no personnel assigned.
 - At the 4th Infantry Division, 13 of 54 squads in the engineer brigade had no personnel assigned or had fewer personnel assigned than required.

The significance of personnel shortfalls in later-deploying divisions cannot be adequately captured solely in terms of overall numbers. The rank, grade, and experience of the personnel assigned must also be considered. For example, captains and majors are in short supply Army-wide due to drawdown initiatives undertaken in recent years. The five later-deploying divisions had only 91 percent and 78 percent of the captains and majors authorized, respectively, but 138 percent of the lieutenants authorized. The result is that unit commanders must fill leadership positions in many units with less experienced officers than Army doctrine requires. For example, in the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division, 65 percent of the key staff positions designated to be filled by captains were actually filled by lieutenants or captains that were not graduates of the Advanced Course. We found that three of the five battalion maintenance officers, four of the six battalion supply officers, and three of the four battalion signal officers were lieutenants rather than captains. While this situation represents an excellent opportunity for the junior officers, it also represents a situation in which critical support functions are being guided by officers without the required training or experience.

There is also a significant shortage of NCOs in the later-deploying divisions. Again, within the 1st Brigade, 226, or 17 percent of the 1,450, total NCO authorizations, were not filled at the time of our visit. As was the case in all the divisions, a significant shortage was at the first-line supervisor, sergeant E-5 level. At the beginning of fiscal year 1998, the 5 later-deploying divisions were short nearly 1,900 of the total 25,357 NCOs authorized, and as of February 15, 1998, this shortage had grown to almost 2,200.

Current Readiness Reports Do Not Fully Disclose Personnel Shortfalls

In recent years, in reports and testimony before the Congress, we discussed the Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS),³ which is used to measure readiness, and reported on the need for improvements. SORTS data for units in the later-deploying divisions have often reflected a high readiness level for personnel because the system uses aggregate statistics to assess personnel readiness. For example, a unit that is short 20 percent of all authorized personnel in the aggregate could still report the ability to undertake most of its wartime mission, even though up to 25 percent of the key leaders and personnel with critical skills may not be assigned. Using aggregate data to reflect personnel readiness masks the underlying personnel problems I have discussed today, such as shortages by skill level, rank, or grade. Compounding these problems are high levels of personnel turnover, incomplete squads and crews, and frequent deployments, none of which are part of the readiness calculation criteria. Yet, when considered collectively, these factors create situations in which commanders may have difficulty developing unit cohesion, accomplishing training objectives, and maintaining readiness.

Judging by our analysis of selected commanders' comments submitted with their SORTS reports and other available data, the problems I have just noted are real. However, some commanders apparently do not consider them serious enough to warrant a downgrade in the reported readiness rating. For example, at one engineer battalion, the commander told us his unit had lost the ability to provide sustained engineer support to the division. His assessment appeared reasonable, since company- and battalion-level training for the past 4 months had been canceled due to the deployment of battalion leaders and personnel to operations in Bosnia. As a result of this deployment, elements of the battalion left behind had only 33 to 55 percent of its positions filled. The commander of this battalion, however, reported an overall readiness assessment of C-2, which was based in part on a personnel level that was over 80 percent in the aggregate. The commander also reported that he would be able to achieve a C-1 status in only 20 training days. This does not seem realistic, given the shortages we noted. We found similar disconnects between readiness conditions as reported in SORTS and actual unit conditions at other armor, infantry, and support units.

³The system assigns each unit a readiness rating from C-1 to C-5. A C-1 unit can undertake the full wartime mission for which it is organized and designed; a C-2 unit can undertake the bulk of its wartime mission; a C-3 unit can undertake major portions of its wartime mission; C-4 and C-5 units are at lower levels of readiness. Each commander reporting readiness may use his/her professional judgment to either upgrade or downgrade the calculated overall C-rating by one level but must provide a written justification in the form of "commander's comments."

Many Factors Have Contributed to Personnel Shortfalls in Later Deploying Divisions

Many factors have contributed to shortfalls of personnel in the Army's later-deploying divisions, including (1) the Army's priority for assigning personnel to units, commands, and agencies; (2) Army-wide shortages of some types of personnel; (3) peacekeeping operations; and (4) the assignment of soldiers to joint and other Army command, recruiting, and base management functions.

Later-Deploying Divisions Receive Low Priority for Staffing

The Army uses a tiered system to allocate personnel and other resources to its units. The Army gives top priority to staffing DOD agencies; major commands such as the Central Command, the European Command, and the Pacific Command; the National Training Center; and the Army Rangers and Special Forces Groups. These entities receive 98 to 100 percent of the personnel authorized for each grade and each military occupational specialty. The 2nd Infantry Division, which is deployed in Korea, and the four contingency divisions are second in priority. Although each receives 98 to 100 percent of its aggregate authorized personnel, the total personnel assigned are not required to be evenly distributed among grades or military specialties. The remaining five later-deploying divisions receive a proportionate share of the remaining forces. Unlike priority one and two forces, the later-deploying units have no minimum personnel level.

Army-wide Shortages of Personnel Have Contributed to Shortfalls

Army-wide shortages of personnel add to the shortfalls of later-deploying divisions. For example, in fiscal year 1997, the Army's enlistment goal for infantrymen was 16,142. However, only about 11,300 of those needed were enlisted, which increased the existing shortage of infantry soldiers by an additional 4,800 soldiers. As of February 15, 1998, Army-wide shortages existed for 28 Army specialties. Many positions in squads and crews are left unfilled or minimally filled because personnel are diverted to work in key positions where they are needed more.

Also, because of shortages of experienced and branch-qualified officers, the Army has instituted an Officer Distribution Plan, which distributes a "fair share" of officers by grade and specialty among the combat divisions. While this plan has helped spread the shortages across all the divisions, we noted significant shortages of officers in certain specialties at the later-deploying divisions.

Peacekeeping Operations Have Exacerbated Shortfalls

Since 1995, when peacekeeping operations began in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there has been a sustained increase in operations for three of the later-deploying divisions: the 1st Armored Division, the 1st Infantry Division, and the 10th Infantry Division. For example, in fiscal year 1997, the 1st Armored Division was directed 89 times to provide personnel for operations other than war and contingency operations, training exercises, and for other assignments from higher commands. More than 3,200 personnel were deployed a total of nearly 195,000 days for the assignments, 89 percent of which were for operations in Bosnia. Similarly, the average soldier in the 1st Infantry Division was deployed 254 days in fiscal year 1997, primarily in support of peacekeeping operations.

Even though the 1st Armored and 1st Infantry Divisions have had 90 percent or more of their total authorized personnel assigned since they began operations in Bosnia, many combat support and service support specialties were substantially understrength, and only three-fourths of field grade officers were in place. As a result, the divisions took personnel from nondeploying units to fill the deploying units with the needed number and type of personnel. As a further result, the commanders of nondeploying units have squads and crews with no, or a minimal number of, personnel.

Other Assignments of Soldiers Have Created More Shortfalls of Personnel

Unit commanders have had to shuffle personnel among positions to compensate for shortages. For example, they

- assign soldiers that exist in the largest numbers—infantry, armor, and artillery—to work in maintenance, supply, and personnel administration due to personnel shortages in these technical specialties;
- assign soldiers to fill personnel shortages at a higher headquarters or to accomplish a mission for higher headquarters; and
- assign soldiers to temporary work such as driving buses, serving as lifeguards, and managing training ranges—vacancies, in some cases, which have resulted from civilian reductions on base.

At the time of our visit, the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division had 372, or 87 percent, of its 428 authorized dismount infantry. However, 51 of these 372 soldiers were assigned to duties outside their specialties to fill critical technical shortages, command-directed positions, and administrative and base management activities. These reassignments lowered the actual number of soldiers available for training to 75 percent daily.

In Germany, at the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division, 21 of 48 infantry squads had no personnel assigned due to shortages. From the remaining 27 squads that were minimally filled, the equivalent of another 5 squads of the Brigade's soldiers were working in maintenance, supply, and administrative specialties to compensate for personnel shortages in those specialties. The end result is that the brigade only had 22 infantry squads with 7 soldiers each rather than 48 squads with 9 soldiers each.

Army Officials Believe Readiness and Training Have Been Degraded

According to Army officials, the reduction of essential training, along with the cumulative impact of the shortages I just outlined, has resulted in an erosion of readiness. Readiness in the divisions responsible for peacekeeping operations in Bosnia has been especially affected because the challenges imposed by personnel shortages are compounded by frequent deployments.

Universally, division officials told us that the shortage of NCOs in the later-deploying divisions is the biggest detriment to overall readiness because crews, squads, and sections are led by lower-level personnel rather than by trained and experienced sergeants. Such a situation impedes effective training because these replacement personnel become responsible for training soldiers in critical skills they themselves may not have been trained to accomplish. At one division, concern was expressed about the potential for a serious training accident because tanks, artillery, and fighting vehicles were being commanded by soldiers without the experience needed to safely coordinate the weapon systems they command.

According to Army officials, the rotation of units to Bosnia has also degraded the training and readiness of the divisions providing the personnel. For example, to deploy an 800-soldier task force last year, the Commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team had to reassign 63 soldiers within the brigade to serve in infantry squads of the deploying unit, strip nondeploying infantry and armor units of maintenance personnel, and reassign NCOs and support personnel to the task force from throughout the brigade. These actions were detrimental to the readiness of the nondeploying units. For example, gunnery exercises for two armor battalions had to be canceled and 43 of 116 tank crews became unqualified on the weapon system, the number of combat systems out of commission increased, and contractors were hired to perform maintenance.

According to 1st Armored and 1st Infantry division officials, this situation has reduced their divisions' readiness to the point of not being prepared to execute wartime missions without extensive training and additional personnel.

Retirees, Individual Ready Reservists, and New Recruits Would Be Used to Fill Shortfalls

If the later-deploying divisions are required to deploy to a second major theater contingency, the Army plans to fill personnel shortfalls with retired servicemembers, members of the Individual Ready Reserve, and newly trained recruits. The number of personnel to fill the later deploying divisions could be extensive, since (1) personnel from later deploying divisions would be transferred to fill any shortages in the contingency units that are first to deploy and (2) these divisions are already short of required personnel.

The Army's plan for providing personnel under a scenario involving two major theater contingencies includes unvalidated assumptions. For example, the plan assumes that the Army's training base will be able to quadruple its output on short notice and that all reserve component units will deploy as scheduled. Army officials told us that based on past deployments, not all the assumptions in their plans will be realized, and there may not be sufficient trained personnel to fully man later-deploying divisions within their scheduled deployment times. Finally, if retired personnel or Individual Ready Reserve members are assigned to a unit, training and crew cohesion may not occur prior to deployment because Army officials expect some units to receive personnel just before deployment.

Solutions Depend on Expectations for Later-Deploying Forces

Finding solutions to the personnel problems I have discussed today will not be easy, given the Army's many missions and reduced personnel. While I have described serious shortfalls of personnel in each of later-deploying divisions, this condition is not necessarily new. What is new is the increased operating tempo, largely brought about because of peacekeeping operations, which has exacerbated the personnel shortfalls in these divisions. However, before any solutions can be discussed, the Army should determine whether it wants to continue to accept the current condition of its active force today, that is, five fully combat-ready divisions and five less than fully combat-capable divisions.

The Army has started a number of initiatives that ultimately may help alleviate some of the personnel shortfalls I have described. These

initiatives include targeted recruiting goals for infantry and maintenance positions; the advanced war-fighting experiment, which may reduce the number of personnel required for a division through the use of technology; and better integration of active and reserve forces. Efforts to streamline institutional forces⁴ may also yield personnel that could be used to fill vacancies such as these noted in my testimony.

If such efforts do not yield sufficient personnel or solutions to deal with the shortages we have noted in this testimony, we believe it is important that the Army, at a minimum, review its current plans for rectifying these shortfalls in the event of a second major theater war. In particular, if the Army expects to deploy fully combat-capable divisions for such a war, it should review the viability of alleviating shortfalls predominately with reservists from the Individual Ready Reserve.

This concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

⁴The Army's institutional force provides generally nondeployable support to the Army infrastructure, including training, doctrine development, base operations, supply, and maintenance.

Active Army Divisions

1st Cavalry Division - headquarters and three brigades at Fort Hood, Tex.

3rd Infantry Division - headquarters and two brigades at Fort Stewart, Ga., and one brigade at Fort Benning, Ga.

82nd Airborne Division - headquarters and three brigades at Fort Bragg, N.C.

101st Airborne Division - headquarters and three brigades at Fort Campbell, Ky.

2nd Infantry Division - headquarters and two brigades in Korea, and one brigade at Fort Lewis, Wash.

1st Infantry Division - headquarters and two brigades in Germany, and one brigade at Fort Riley, Kans.

1st Armored Division - headquarters and two brigades in Germany, and one brigade at Fort Riley, Kans.

4th Infantry Division - headquarters and two brigades at Fort Hood, Tex., and one brigade at Fort Carson, Colo.

10th Mountain Division - headquarters and two brigades at Fort Drum, N.Y.

25th Infantry Division - headquarters and two brigades at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and one brigade at Fort Lewis, Wash.

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